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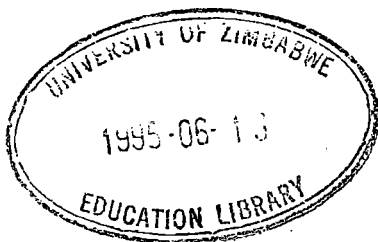
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# **Design And Function Of The School Uniform: Its Production Within The School Curriculum**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study is concerned with the improvement of school uniforms in Zimbabwe by taking into account the wishes of pupils and by involving them in their production. A case study focusing on urban schools and district council schools was conducted. The study was undertaken in the belief that if students are involved in the design and making of uniforms, these will be functional, and pupils are likely to appreciate them.*

*The study revealed three interesting points:*

- 1. Pupils were generally dissatisfied with the function of uniforms*
- 2. The majority of the pupils expressed their willingness to be involved in the making of uniforms because they believed it helped reduce the cost of buying the uniforms, and they would produce uniform garments whose functional values would be close to their tastes.*
- 3. Teachers expressed their willingness to help the pupils with the making of some uniform garments as part of education with production (EWP).*

*Based on that the above findings, a strong case can be made that favours the involvement of pupils in the making of uniforms and, to that extent, the concept of education with production will become more meaningful to them. Furthermore, by participating in the making of their own uniforms, pupils will gain practical skills in designing and constructing garments.*

## **Introduction**

The wearing of school uniforms is an important social aspect of the Zimbabwean school system. In both urban and rural schools, whether government, mission and other private schools throughout the country, boys and girls are expected to wear uniforms. But, as in many other social institutions, the system of school uniforms has its advantages and disadvantages. As uniforms are a permanent feature of the school system in Zimbabwe, it would be instructive to know what more could be done to enhance their advantages while at the same time minimising the disadvantages. Advantages and disadvantages of the school uniform are determined by its design as well as by its functional values such as protection and comfort. A study of the design and the function of the school uniform was then conducted. Its objectives were:

1. to determine the suitability of school uniforms in terms of protection and comfort, from the pupils' point of view,
2. to determine possible roles that pupils could play in designing and making their uniforms.

This study was conducted to find out the suitability of the uniform from the pupil's point of view, and how the pupils could be involved in choosing, and possibly, in the making of the uniform garments that they find most functional.

The findings of the study should prove useful to those who have the responsibility of making and selling the uniforms. The study should also be helpful to the pupils, if they are to participate in the choice and production of garments, in that they will acquire certain skills in decision making and in designing and constructing garments.

## **Rationale**

Function and design are very important factors in a school uniform. Clothing should not only cover the skin, but should also be well designed, pleasing to look at and comfortable to wear. Clothing is an extension of the skin as "... it modifies the heat regulating function of

the skin..." (Watkin 1984, p. 35). Watkin's ideas are pertinent to this study in that a well designed garment must contribute to the regulating function of the skin. A school uniform worn daily all the year round under different climatic conditions, should then be functional and its design pleasing to the pupils.

To provide uniforms for their children, many families incur enormous expenses. A Mrs. Bull in the *Herald* (January, 1989), complains that the cost of buying uniforms for several school children is prohibitive. She suggests that the production of some parts of the uniform be done within the school curriculum by the pupils themselves. Pupils could suggest designs of their own liking as long as they are acceptable to the school authorities, and are functional. Presently, the uniforms that pupils use are designed and constructed without their involvement.

Although pupils in Zimbabwe need not have uniforms to attend school, school uniform nevertheless plays a very important role in our society. It serves to minimise the image or appearance of those pupils who come from very poor families. When in uniform, the poorer pupils do not feel ashamed of what they are wearing as they are clothed like anyone else. "Clothing shall offer respectability and prevent man from being ashamed", so argues Wallin (1983, p. 12). This respectability is what the uniform offers to the poorer pupils.

The arguments above suggest the need to consider having pupils make their own uniforms in schools. The making of uniforms could be done as part of education with production.

## Definition of Terms

In order to facilitate understanding of the study, certain key terms need to be defined:

### Function

Functional clothing is that which is principally for protection and comfort. This is the sense in which the term is used in this study.

## **Design**

In this study, design refers to the construction of patterns for garments, and the balance of shape and lines on the garment.

## **School Uniform**

The school uniform is the same type of clothing worn by all pupils of a given sex attending a particular school. All such pupils wear a uniform made of the same material, design and colour.

## **School curriculum**

Inlow, in Stonhouse (1975), defines the school curriculum as a planned composite effort of any school to guide the pupils' learning towards pre-determined learning outcomes.

## **Review of Literature**

Not much has been written regarding the advantages and disadvantages of uniform wearing by school children in Zimbabwe. However, some literature exists on the general questions of garment design, function of clothing and symbolic values of clothing, as the following section demonstrates.

Design is the construction and adaptation of patterns in garment making. It is a factor that determines the look of the garment. Aldrich (1980, p. 5) writes that "... the basic principles of a good design have to operate: the choice of material, the balance of shapes and lines, the most important factor consideration of the function of the garment." She continues to state that the garment can only look beautiful if it is cut out using a well-constructed pattern, which is comfortable to wear. The design of a uniform should as much as possible be chosen by those who are to wear it as it determines the function of their uniform garments.

Also, clothing holds functional values which have to do with how one feels physically in a garment, and symbolic values which have to do with the look of the garment. According to Wallin and Karrholm (1987), in a good

design, both functional and symbolic values are satisfied. They argue that pupils should, therefore, physically feel comfortable in their uniforms and should look beautiful in them.

Wallin (1985) defines functional values as protection and comfort. Protective clothing provides the wearer with thermal and other protection. The wearer is protected from rain, strong winds, extreme temperatures and humidity. It should also protect the wearer from environmental dangers such as pollution. This should apply to the school uniform worn daily in different climatic conditions.

Wallin (1985) goes on to express satisfaction that clothing should also be comfortable to wear. She states that it should provide the wearer with both thermal and tactile comfort. Thermal comfort, according to Wallin, ensures that the pupils are provided with micro-climate in the layer between the skin and clothes. There should be adequate ventilation when it is hot, warmth when it is cold, and moisture should be absorbed from the body.

With regard to symbolic values, Dahlman (1986), suggests that these have decisive influence on the choice of, and contentment with, the products. They include aspects such as self esteem, decoration group membership and socio-cultural environments. The wearer, by his/her exterior appearance, makes an impression on people. Wallin (1985, p. 280) writes that "clothing should look attractive and offer values such as self-esteem, respectability, status, confidence..." Symbolic values partly signify ideology and culture. These are greatly influenced by the society the wearer belongs to. These values may become less important when functional values are the main criteria, for example in the case of protective clothing.

Wallin (1983) carried out researches into functions and designs of clothing for the elderly and industrial workers. Her studies resulted in the development of overalls that prevented the penetration of oil on the under-clothes of the workers. For the elderly, loose fitting garments with wide openings for easy wearing were developed. For both the elderly and the workers, the developed clothes were designed according to their specific functions.

The suitability of the school uniform should be subjected to further research, and continuously be investigated to ensure that it is functional, sensible and comfortable.

### **The design and making of the uniform within the school curriculum as part of education with production.**

According to Inlow, in Stonhouse (1975), the curriculum is the planned composite effort of any school to guide pupil learning towards predetermined learning outcomes. Education with production is a concept that qualifies very well as part of the school curriculum because pupil learning is guided towards the acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge. Education with production (EWP) is a concept which has been looked at differently in different countries. Its main objectives are:

- (a) to bridge the gap that exists between manual labour and mental activity;
- (b) to integrate theory and practice within and between subjects.

In Zimbabwe, teachers of practical subjects respond to the question of EWP by talking about skills training or production of useful articles as the essence of EWP (Gustafsson, 1985). Fashion and Fabrics is one of the practical subjects. The school uniform is a very useful article that merits production within the school curriculum. The making of parts of the uniform certainly qualifies as EWP.

### **The Study**

A case study was conducted in two former group B government schools in the city of Bulawayo, and two District Council (DC) schools in Lupane. The population consisted of four Form I classes and four Form III classes. These were the classes available at the time of the study. One Form I class and one Form III class in each school were used. Four schools were studied.

The study was carried out during the 1988 November-December examination period. Form IIs and IVs were doing their national examinations and therefore could not participate in the study. Although



Form Is and IIIs were also doing their end of the year examinations, there were times when some classes were free. These were the classes that were part of the sample.

There were 132 pupils in Forms I and III from government schools and 114 from DC schools, giving a total population of 246 pupils. The teachers' population was made up of six teachers who taught Fashion and Fabrics at the time. These were from three of the four schools that participated in the study. The fourth school had just phased out Fashion and Fabrics at the time. The schools studied were some of those where girls wear one kind of dress all the year round.

### **The Sample**

Out of 246, a sample of 72 pupils was chosen from government schools and 67 pupils from DC schools, totalling 139 pupils selected for the study. In each school, the sample was chosen with the help of the headmaster. Classes that were free at the time were used. When a Form I class completed questionnaires in one school, the researcher requested for a Form III class in the next school. The subjects were required to complete two types of questionnaires.

### **The Instruments**

One-hundred-and-twenty pupils completed questionnaire A and 19 completed questionnaire B. Questionnaire B differed from questionnaire A in that besides all questions questionnaire A had, it also had eleven additional questions to probe for more information. Questionnaire B was intended to be used for interviews with 20 pupils. The interviews were not possible to conduct because the headmasters felt that they would use too much of the pupils' study time. However, 19 were given the interview questionnaire to complete. Questionnaire A was completed by 120 pupils. In the questionnaires pupils were asked to respond to each topic, ticking the response which described best their reactions, and giving reasons where necessary. All questions were structured.

Questionnaire A was completed by four different classes, 30 Form I and 33 Form III pupils from government schools, and 33 Form I and 24 Form III pupils from DC schools (Table I).

Nineteen pupils who completed questionnaire B, worked in three groups of five and one of four (Table I). These were also selected with the help of headmasters. In three schools the first five Form I or III pupils to be seen around were called to complete the questionnaire. In the fourth school there were only four pupils available to complete the questionnaire.

Headmasters helped with the selection of the sample so as to minimise interruption of examinations as the study was conducted during the November-December end of year examination time.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution Of Questionnaires A and B**  
**To Pupils In Each School**

School	Form	Pupils who completed Q		Total
		A	B	
Government				
1st school	Form 1	30	-	34
	Form 3	-	4	
2nd school	Form1	-	5	38
	Form 3	33	-	
DC				
1st school	Form 1	33	-	38
	Form 3	-	5	
2nd school	Form 1	-	5	29
	Form 3	24	-	
Grand Totals		120	19	139

Q = Questionnaire

Out of 139 pupils who completed the questionnaires, 73 (53%) were in Form I and 66 (47%) were in Form III. In terms of sex 61 (44%) girls and 78 (56%) boys completed questionnaires A and B. There were 72 (52%) pupils from government schools and 67 (48%) pupils from DC schools.

Unstructured interviews were carried out with three teachers. One was a third year student teacher. The other two had been teaching Fashion and Fabrics for almost ten years. All were female. They all taught Fashion and Fabrics at the time the study was carried out. Two were from government schools and one from a DC school.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency distributions and percentages.

## **Findings**

### **Design and Function**

The data revealed that girls from the two government schools used either dresses or skirts and blouses for the uniform. Those from the two DC schools used skirts and blouses only. This resulted in the majority of girls (36 out of 61) using skirts and blouses and 25 using dresses.

The dresses from both government schools were made from the same quality of fabric and design, but of different colours. All blouses from the four schools were white. The skirts from all the four schools were made from the same quality of fabric and design but of different colours. The colours were chosen by school authorities and a few parents.

Boys from all schools used the uniforms from same quality of fabric, colour and design. They wore shorts in summer and trousers in winter.

Dresses, blouses, skirts, some shorts and trousers had buttons to close the front openings. Skirts, the rest of the shorts and trousers had zips and buttons at waists to close the openings. The dresses also had zips at the side. All garments had pockets.

The data showed that all pupils liked the quality of fabrics their uniform garments were made of. They also liked the designs of their uniforms, but were not pleased with their functional values. It was found that 64 (46%)

pupils complained about loosening buttons, 56 (40%) pupils complained about small pockets, 82 (59%) complained about breaking seams. The largest number 100 (72%) complained about breaking zips (Table II).

**Table 2**  
**Complaints Pupils Had About The Function Of**  
**the Uniform Garments**

Type of complaint	Girls = 61				Boys = 78		Total = 139	
	25 with dresses		36 with skirts & blouses		with shirts & shorts		(100%)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Buttons pockets	5	20	18	50	41	53	64	46
Small pockets	19	76	30	83	37	47	56	40
Seam break	13	52	19	53	50	64	82	59
Zips break	18	72	30	83	52	67	100	72

Out of 139 pupils, 102 (73%) complained about the high cost of buying the uniform. Forty-six were from government schools and 56 from DC schools.

The data showed that the majority of the pupils (Table III) and the three teachers reported that the involvement of pupils in making part of the uniform could help reduce the cost. The making of these parts could be done as part of the school curriculum under EWP.

### **Production of the uniform as EWP**

Most of the pupils expressed the willingness to make some garments of the uniform (Table III).

**Table 3**  
**Pupils' Willingness To Make Uniform Garments**

Sex	Number of pupils willing to make their uniform garments	Number of pupils not willing to make their uniform garments	Total (100%)
Boy	52 (67% of boys)	26 (33% of boys)	78
Girls	47 (77% of girls)	14 (23% of girls)	61
Total	99 (71% of total)	40 (29% of total)	139

Table 3 shows that out of 139 pupils, 99 (71%) expressed the willingness to make parts of the uniform themselves. The three teachers interviewed were willing to help with the making-up exercise. The table also indicates that 52 (67%) of the 78 boys were willing to take part in making the uniform yet these did not have any sewing background.

The data revealed that out of the 67 pupils from DC schools 58 (87% of these) were willing to make parts of the uniform, and out of the 72 pupils from government schools, there were 41 (57% of the 72) who were willing to make the uniform garments.

Out of 61 girl participants, 24 took Fashion and Fabrics. Twenty-two of the girls who took Fashion and Fabrics expressed the willingness to make some uniform garments and construct their own patterns.

The results obtained cannot be generalised to all schools in Zimbabwe but only apply to the population in the study, because schools, and the sample in each school, were not randomly chosen. The number of schools used is also too small to generalise the results. Only four schools were used. However, there were no marked differences between the results obtained from government schools and those from DC schools.

## **Discussion And Recommendations**

On the function and design of the school uniform the pupils were concerned about zips and seam breakages. This was evident during data collection as some pupils were seen moving around with broken zips and seams. The majority of those with broken zips were girls. Most boys had broken seams. The data also revealed that zips and seams warranted some improvements.

As stated in the review of literature, the uniform should offer respectability. With broken zips and seams pupils definitely felt that they lost some respectability because of what they wore, as the garments did not properly cover what they intended to cover. It is then important that pupils are involved in the choice of designs that they find the most functional.

As a reaction to the complaints, simple patterns were developed and prototypes cut out of those patterns were constructed by the researcher. These were constructed without zips and strong threads were used. The prototypes for girls were constructed with slightly bigger pockets.

It is recommended that buttons be sewn on by hand because machine sewn on buttons loosen easily.

The recommended prototypes were designed based on the responses obtained from the questionnaires. These are therefore close to their ideals. Participation of pupils in the choice, design or making of the uniform would lead to the construction of garments of their ideals.

Out of 139 pupils, 73% of pupils were concerned about the high cost of buying the uniform. The cost of the uniform is ever increasing. All the Form III pupils had replaced their uniforms at least once because they either outgrew them or the old ones tore. Each time new garments were bought, the cost had increased. Those mostly affected by the cost were

pupils from the DC schools. Fifty-six (84%) of the 67 pupils from DC schools as compared to 46 (64%) of the 72 pupils from government schools complained about the cost.

Most parents from the rural areas are unemployed and do not have means of making money, therefore they find it very difficult to buy uniforms for their children. Although there are unemployed parents in the cities, these have other means of making money, for example, selling of small articles like vegetables, and are therefore in a better financial position, and can afford the cost of the uniform better than those in the rural areas. This is evident from the results obtained. More pupils from DC schools as compared to those from government schools felt that the uniform was expensive.

Some of the uniform garments with simple designs could be produced within the school curriculum as EWP. These include straight and A-line skirts, and loose fitting blouses and shirts.

The data in Table 3 reveals that 99 (71%) pupils had positive attitudes towards the production of the school uniform as EWP and expressed the willingness to be involved in the production. Among these, there were some pupils with basic garment making skills. These together with their teachers could train those without any skills. The training could take time but skills gained eventually, could be of use to the pupils for the rest of their lives.

The training could be done using cloth from their old clothes or cheap fabric like calico. After acquiring basic garment making skills, pupils could then buy correct fabric for the uniform and make the garments themselves. That could reduce the cost of buying the uniform because no labour would be charged. Pupils could also develop more designs, share ideas and gradually acquire more and more knowledge in garment design and construction.

Seventy-seven (55%) pupils willing to make parts of the uniform had never taken Fashion and Fabrics and therefore did not know what difficulties would be encountered during the making of the garments. These pupils include 52 boys and 25 girls. However the 22 who took Fashion and Fabrics and the three teachers concurred that the making of the parts of the uniform was possible, and therefore together they could succeed in helping others grasp some basic sewing skills and reasonable garments could be produced eventually.

A greater percentage of boys (33% of boys) as compared to that of the girls (23% of girls) were not for the idea of making some parts of the uniform themselves. Perhaps it is because of negative attitudes boys had towards taking Fashion and Fabrics or Food and Nutrition, as they believed that these were girls' subjects. Garment making, which is part of Fashion and Fabrics is then considered to be for girls. However, because more than half of the boys (67% of boys) expressed the willingness to take part in the making, it might reflect a change of attitude towards Fashion and Fabrics by the boys. The Ministry of Education and Culture has encouraged boys to take Fashion and Fabrics and Food and Nutrition, and girls to take Woodwork and Metalwork, perhaps this is the right time to get them to do so.

Comparing the schools, 87% of the pupils from DC schools as compared to 57% of those from government schools wanted to make parts of the uniform themselves. As stated before rural parents' financial position is worse than those in the cities. Those pupils then felt that if they made the garments at school, they could help in reducing the cost of buying the uniform. Besides, uniforms were not obtained from any of their nearby shops in the rural areas. Parents or pupils themselves had to board buses to town to buy uniforms, and therefore needed a lot of money for transport to town where uniforms are bought.

The production of the uniform at school could help reduce costs, because buying fabrics and making of the garments by the pupils could be cheaper than buying ready made garments, and could save transport money for those in rural areas. The fabrics could be bought when other school requirements are being bought. The recommended patterns developed by the researcher could be used if the making exercise is practised if they are acceptable to pupils. If not, these could be modified to their likings.

The garments could be made as part of EWP. In Zimbabwe EWP has very much concentrated on Agriculture. If uniform making could be part of EWP programmes, pupils could gain by making their own garments.

Pupils could also venture into pattern construction because commercial patterns are very expensive. One of the teachers argued that pattern construction was time consuming and with lots of commercial patterns around, it was not necessary. However, most pupils were concerned about the expense, and pattern construction could help reduce the cost. As far as the time factor is concerned not all pupils need be involved in construction at a given time. Some could construct patterns while others



sew. The sewing could start off by hand. Those with access to machines could use them. Meanwhile pupils could ask for donations from different sources such as the industries, donor agencies and the society. Pattern construction could bring lots of fun to the whole exercise of making the uniform. Pupils could develop their own designs and come up with different possible designs for school uniforms, as long as these designs are within acceptable limits by the standards of the school authorities.

The making of parts of the school uniform could start at any level as long as pupils will have mastered basic sewing skills. Production of the parts of the uniform could be done as an extra-curricula activity, a club for instance.

The Form I to IV Fashion and Fabrics syllabus suggest that the making of the uniform garments could be done at all levels. At all levels pupils make outer garments. They also do the repair and maintenance of personal clothing. With that knowledge, those taking Fashion and Fabrics, together with their teachers could help others. For schools that do not offer Fashion and Fabrics, the making of garments could be done after planned lessons. These schools can work together with those that offer Fashion and Fabrics in the training exercise.

## **Conclusion And Implications**

The purpose of the study was to find out the suitability of the school uniform from the pupils' point of view, and to determine the part they could play in making the uniform.

The review of literature on function emphasizes the importance of protection and comfort. The findings revealed that comfort was the most important to pupils. Broken seams and zips were of concern to both boys and girls. These made them feel uncomfortable as the garments no longer completely cover what they intended to cover.

Involvement of pupils in the choice of designs, or possibly in the making of the uniform could result in uniforms close to their ideals.

Despite boys and some girls having no knowledge in sewing, they expressed the willingness to be involved in making parts of the uniform.

The making process is therefore possible to implement, firstly in experimental groups and could be part of the school curriculum.

Some key questions that need attention are:

Would those who produce and sell school uniforms be willing to involve the pupils in the choice of patterns and fabrics or possibly in the production?

To what extent will the making of uniform garments under EWP help some pupils after they leave school?

Different kinds of activities could be experimented with to find out which could benefit the pupils and the school most. EWP could be introduced in more schools to encourage technical development in Zimbabwe.

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